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A DIALOGUE ON IMMORTALITY.

BY ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER.

(Translated from the German, by Chas. L. Bernays.)

Philaletes.—I could tell you that, after your death, you will be what you were previous to your birth; I could tell you that we are never born, and that we only seem to die—that we have always been precisely the same that we are now, and that we shall always remain the same—that *Time* is the apparatus which prevents us from being aware of all this; I could tell you that our consciousness stands always in the centre of *Time*—never on one of its termini; and that any one among us, therefore, has the immovable centre of the whole infinite *Time* in himself. I then could tell you that those who, by that knowledge, are assured that the present time always originates in ourselves, can never doubt the indestructibility of their own essence.

Thrasymachus.—All of that is too long and too ambiguous for me. Tell me, briefly, what I shall be after death.

Phil.—All and nothing.

Thras.—There we are! Instead of a solution to the problem you give me a contradiction; that is an old trick.

Phil.—To answer transcendental questions in language that is only made for immanent perceptions, may in fact lead us into contradictions.

Thras.—What do you mean by “transcendental” and “immanent” perceptions?

Phil.—Well! *Transcendental* perception is rather the knowledge, which, by exceeding any possibility of experience, tends to discover the essence of things as they are by themselves; *immanent* perception it is, if it keeps inside of the limits of experience. In this case, it can only speak of appearances. You, as an individual, end with your death. Yet individuality is not your true and final essence, but only a mere appearance of it. It is not the *thing in itself*, but only its appearance, established in the form of time, thereby having a beginning and an end. That which is essential in you, knows neither of beginning

nor ending, nor of Time itself; it knows no limits such as belong to a given individuality, but exists in all and in each. In the first sense, therefore, you will become nothing after your death; in the second sense, you are and remain all. For that reason I said you would be all and nothing. You desired a short answer, and I believe that hardly a more correct answer could be given *briefly*. No wonder, too, that it contains a contradiction; for your life is in Time, while your immortality is in Eternity.

Thras.—Without the continuation of my individuality, I would not give a farthing for all your “immortality.”

Phil.—Perhaps you could have it even cheaper. Suppose that I warrant to you the continuation of your individuality, but under the condition that a perfectly unconscious slumber of death for three months should precede its resuscitation.

Thras.—Well, I accept the condition.

Phil.—Now, in an absolutely unconscious condition, we have no measure of time; hence it is perfectly indifferent whether, whilst we lie asleep in death in the unconscious world, three months or ten thousand years are passing away. We do not know either of the one or of the other, and have to accept some one’s word with regard to the duration of our sleep, when we awake. Hence it is indifferent to you whether your individuality is given back to you after three months or after ten thousand years.

Thras.—That I cannot deny.

Phil.—Now, suppose that after ten thousand years, one had forgotten to awake you at all, then I believe that the long, long state of non-being would become so habitual to you that your misfortune could hardly be very great. Certain it is, in any way, that you would know nothing of it; nay, you would even console yourself very easily, if you were aware that the secret mechanism which now keeps

your actual appearance in motion, had not ceased during all the ten thousand years for a single moment to establish and to move other beings of the same kind.

Thras.—In that manner you mean to cheat me out of my individuality, do you? I will not be fooled in that way. I have bargained for the continuation of my individuality, and none of your motives can console me for the loss of that; I have it at heart, and I never will abandon it.

Phil.—It seems that you hold individuality to be so noble, so perfect, so incomparable, that there can be nothing superior to it; you therefore would not like to exchange it for another one, though in that, you could live with greater ease and perfection.

Thras.—Let my individuality be as it may, it is always myself. It is I—I myself—who want to be. That is the individuality which I insist upon, and not such a one as needs argument to convince me that it may be my own or a better one.

Phil.—Only look about you! That which cries out—"I, I myself, wish to exist"—that is not yourself alone, but all that has the least vestige of consciousness. Hence this desire of yours, is just that which is not individual, but common rather to all without exception; it does not originate in individuality, but in the very nature of existence itself; it is essential to anybody who lives, nay, it is that through which it is at all; it seems to belong only to the individual because it can become conscious only in the individual. What cries in us so loud for existence, does so only through the mediation of the individual; immediately and essentially it is the *will* to exist or to live, and this *will* is one and the same in all of us. Our existence being only the free work of the will, existence can never fail to belong to it, as far, at least, as that eternally dissatisfied will, can be satisfied. The individualities are indifferent to the will; it never speaks of them; though it seems to the individual, who, in himself is the immediate percipient of it, as if it spoke only of his own individuality. The consequence is, that the individual cares for his own existence with so great anxiety, and that he thereby secures the preservation of his kind. Hence it fol-

lows that individuality is no perfection, but rather a restriction or imperfection; to get rid of it is not a loss but a gain. Hence, if you would not appear at once childish and ridiculous, you should abandon that care for mere individuality; for childish and ridiculous it will appear when you perceive your own essence to be the universal will to live.

Thras.—You yourself and all philosophers are childish and ridiculous, and in fact it is only for a momentary diversion that a man of good common sense ever consents to squander away an idle hour with the like of you. I leave your talk for weightier matters.

[The reader will perceive by the positions here assumed that Schopenhauer has a truly speculative stand-point; that he holds self-determination to be the only substantial (or abiding) reality. But while Aristotle and those like him have seized this more definitely as the self-conscious thinking, it is evident that Schopenhauer seizes it only from its immediate side, i. e. as the *will*. On this account he meets with some difficulty in solving the problem of immortality, and leaves the question of conscious identity hereafter, not a little obscure. Hegel, on the contrary, for whom Schopenhauer everywhere evinces a hearty contempt, does not leave the individual in any doubt as to his destiny, but shows how individuality and universality coincide in self-consciousness, so that the desire for eternal existence is fully satisfied. This is the legitimate result that *Philaethes* arrives at in his last speech, when he makes the individuality a product of the will; for if the will is the essential that he holds it to be, and the product of its activity is individuality, of course individuality belongs eternally to it. At the close of his *Philosophy of Nature*, (Encyclopædia, vol. II.) Hegel shows how death which follows life in the mere animal—and in man as mere animal—enters consciousness as one of its necessary elements, and hence does not stand opposed to it as it does to animal life. Conscious being (*Spirit* or *Mind* as it may be called,) is therefore immortal because it contains already, within itself, its limits or determinations, and thus cannot, like finite things, encounter dissolution through external ones.—Ed.]